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ABSTRACT

The development of the Pennsylvania State Department of Education's Tests of Essential Learning Skills (TELS) program objectives is described. A conceptual framework is presented that incorporates reading skills into the social studies curriculum. Instructional strategies designed to assist in the development of reading skills in the content areas are related to the TELS objectives. Some of the strategies described include: structured overview (a graphic and hierarchical presentation of the relationship of key ideas and concepts encountered in the reading); clustering or webbing (a graphic way of organizing what is read without an imposed hierarchical structure); interactive note taking (a system of linking new passages to the learner's existing knowledge); and a leveled reading guide which assists the learner in identifying the important parts of a reading/assignment. Four figures referred to in the text and a 9-item list of references are included. (Author/DB)

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TELS Reading Objectives in the Social Studies

Some Instructional Strategies

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(ABSTRACT)

The article describes the development of the Pennsylvania State Department of Education's Tests of Essential Learning Skills Program (TELS) Objectives. A conceptual framework is presented to incorporate reading skills in the social studies curriculum. Instructional strategies designed to assist in the development of reading skills in the content areas are related to the TELS objectives. Some of the strategies described include: structured overviews, clustering, interactive note taking, leveled reading guides, and other reading skill activities.

Inclusion of TELS Objectives in the Social Studies Curriculum: Some Instructional Strategies

The development of a competency testing program for the state of Pennsylvania with the stated goal of providing remediation for those students in need of help was interrupted briefly during the summer of 1987, when the new Secretary of Education, Thomas K. Gilhool, made public the test results and released a school district ranking based on student performance on the TELS tests for the years 1985, 1986, and 1987. The data was accompanied by statements from the secretary which implied that the TELS tests were a measure of how well a school was educating children.

The releasing of the report data was a shock to many school officials who never expected to see their schools evaluated by a program designed initially to provide funds for remediation in reading and math instruction. As the controversy expanded, reports of widespread abuse of the tests surfaced. In many cases, school districts had realigned their curriculum to match TELS objectives and were teaching the objectives a whole year prior to the testing dates. These efforts were seen as having an obvious impact on the students' performance. Some school systems were known to have actually allowed students a "dry run" of the test with appropriate coaching a week prior to the actual test date. These discoveries prompted a memo to all superintendents from Dr. Donna D. Wall, Commissioner for Basic Education, concerning guidelines for test security prior to the 1988 administration of the tests.

Schools which viewed the TELS program as a sincere way to identify students who needed help, and to obtain state funding for that remediation, did not initally alter their curriculum to accommodate the TELS program objectives.

Subsequently, many school districts were involved in a flurry of activity to realign curriculum and in-service teachers in an effort to increase TELS results prior to the next testing date and the Pennsylvania Department of Education's release of ranked data.

When Secretary Gilhool initially released the TELS data in June, 1987, he stated that he hoped that the information would stir a modest hurricane of comment and conversation. What the data did was to force all school districts to reevaluate their programs, and to align their curriculum to match the objectives and skills tested in the TELS program. Teaching to the test has become a reality for the public schools unless they desire to bury their heads in the sand and receive the criticism of being compared to other "more effective" schools in the state.

Test Development and Background.

The Tests of Essential Learning Skills program (formerly known as the Tests for Essential Learning and Literacy Skills) evolved from the publication of Pennsylvania Governor Thornburgh's education reform program outlined in the 1983 document entitled Turning the Tide: An Agenda for Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Schools. The reform program advocated competency testing at grades three, five, and eight. The tests were to focus on reading and math skills essential for success at the appropriate grade levels. The tests were to be an "early warning system" to identify those students who were in need of remediation. State funding was provided to remediate those students identified in need of assistance.

Subsequently, in June of 1984, the State Board of Education added Chapter 3: Student Testing to its regulations. The regulations required the testing of all public school students in grades three, five, and eight. Criterion

referenced tests in reading and mathematics were developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Division of Educational Testing and Evaluation (ET&E). In April, 1984 the ET&E organized several committees to identify skills and objectives to be included on the TELS tests at appropriate grade levels. Committees were comprised of teachers, supervisors, ECIA Chapter I personnel, representatives of the Keystone State Reading Association and the Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of Mathematics, college and university subject area specialists, and representatives from the two major teacher organizations.

The committees met to identify the appropriate grade level objectives and were given the task of comparing them to objectives submitted from several test publishing companies who were bidding to be selected to produce the test. The reading tests currently include fourteen objectives at grade 3, eighteen at grade 5 and twenty-five for grade 8.

The initial battery of tests was administered in 1984. Testing in 1985 was interrupted when a new test publisher was contracted to develop the test items. In March 1986, the second statewide administration of the TELS was completed. During the summer of 1986, further revisions were undertaken by the ET&E with the help of subject area specialists in reading. Another field test was conducted in October of 1986, with 44 school districts participating. Several objectives were deleted from the test because they were determined to be inappropriate at the designated grade levels.

Continued development and refinement of the tests are being carried on by the ET&E and have included a reevaluation of the cut off scores since the administration of the 1988 tests. Tentative proposals for the future include: giving the reading and math tests every year in grades two through eight; using the TELS tests to identify Chapter I and TELS students eligible for remediation, thereby eliminating Chapter I testing; and, linking the 12 Goals of Quality

Education to the test objectives as a measure of school effectiveness in meeting the stated goals.

The TELS program was originally designed to identify students in need of remediation and provide funding to assist school districts in helping those students in grades 3, 5, and 8 who needed help. Subsequently, the TELS test results have been used as a measure to identify and rank school districts across the state as effective or not effective in teaching their students. This sudden shift in emphasis has presented a problem for teachers and administrators who must now reevaluate their programs and align their curriculum to fit the TELS testing program.

Curriculum approaches that teach specifically to a test can be viewed as both unethical and counter productive if the practices are contrary to what educators already know about proper content and process in education. This is especially true when one considers the individual differences of students in terms of learning styles, developmental skills, and cognitive levels of functioning at the various grade levels. To expect every child to be able to master the same grade level skills at a given grade level is perhaps unrealistic, unless one is developing a minimal competency test.

The TELS tests were not designed to be competency tests in the true sense of the term. Most competency tests are developed from a minimal set of criteria designed to be mastered by all students prior to exiting school. The skills selected to be tested reflect the minimal skills needed to function as an individual in society today. The TELS tests were developed to reflect the teaching objectives taught at each grade level to the students. While the objectives may represent minimal skills needed to function in society, it is obvious that there will always be students who operate below grade level regardless of the effectiveness of the educational program.

As teachers and administrators approach curriculum development with success on the TELS tests as a goal, they need not plan a total revision of the curriculum to attain that success. Skill areas in reading and math can be addressed without major shifts in the curriculum that detract from regular classroom learning.

Perhaps the most effective way to approach the TELS dilemma of achieving excellence without compromising values and teaching to the test is to develop and implement a total school program to improve reading and math skills across the curriculum. With very few changes in most existing curriculums, teachers can affect student performance on TELS tests in their classrooms. This is especially true when an emphasis is placed on reading and research objectives in the content areas.

Social studies teachers have the unique responsibility of teaching not only content, but also skills and values in the classroom. Reading skills have often been emphasized as a vital component of the social studies classroom. A survey of the 1987 TELS Reading Objectives and the 1984 National Council for the Social Studies Essential Skills for the Social Studies illustrates this point. Every TELS reading objective for grades 3, 5, and 8 can be identified in the K-12 listing of Essential Skills for the Social Studies in the areas of Reading Skills, Vocabulary, Study Skills, Reference Skills, and Intellectual Skills (NCSS, 1984).

Integration of TELS Reading Skills

All too often content area teachers do not assume the responsibility of developing reading and critical thinking skills in the classroom. Teachers often expect that students will innately have the ability to go beyond literal comprehension of reading material without ever being provided formal instrucion

in how to think critically, or how to read for meaning within a given classroom assignment.

Given the present emphasis on competency testing in schools throughout the nation today, educators should systematically examine the curriculum components in place in their schools and make efforts to integrate basic skills into all areas of the curriculum. What is needed is a conceptual framework which orients content area teachers to the improvement of reading instruction and comprehension in all subject areas, not just in reading or English classrooms.

Anticipation, Realization and Contemplation

Ausubel (1974), stated that the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. This statement provides a basis for a conceptual framework of pre-instructional activities that encompass many approaches to reading instruction. Estes and Vaughn (1986), outlined a process which built on this framework and organized reading strategies designed to improve meaningful learning in reading and the content areas. Anticipation, Realization, and Contemplation (A. R. C.) is a framework to organize instructional processes which facilitate learning whenever students interact with written material. The premise is that reading and reading skills are tools to aid learning and not isolated skills to be taught without an instructional focus.

Anticipation is the component of the framework that includes prereading activites designed to create collective impressions of a topic to be read. Instructional strategies such as brainstorming, clustering or webbing, structured overviews, advanced organizers, and anticipation guides can easily be integrated into the content areas of instruction to develop skills in reading that go beyond literal comprehension. These activites are designed to create

for the learner a need to read and serve to link existing knowledge to the new knowledge to be learned.

The textbook is and will continue to be a significant influence on instruction in the public school. It has often been suggested that, the textbook dictates the curriculum. Textbook publishers have been assailed for their watering-down of the content in the texts and their continued depiction of stereotypical views, biased attitudes and avoidance of controversial or sensitive social issues. Rather than bemoan these shortcommings, educators should approach the textbook as a tool to be used in the instructional process that develops not only basic skills in reading, but also inferential reading skills that go beyond literal comprehension.

Students need to be aware of ways to interact with textbooks. They need to know how to study, how to extract important information from the text, and how to remember important concepts. A textbook inventory promotes familiarization with a textbook's organization and structure. It is an activity to be initiated at the beginning of the year and reinforced throughout the year. Research and reference skills are transferable to most subject areas and utilization of a table of contents, index, glossary and vocabulary context clues within textbooks develop skills that can be applied in many similar situations. Map and graph skills developed within most social studies texts can also be applied in other curricular content areas. A review of the TELS objectives will indicate a great emphasis on research skills inherent in the effective use of a social studies text.

Structured Overview

A structured overview is a graphic and hierarchical presentation of the relationships of key ideas and concepts to be encountered in the reading and subsequent instructional activities (Barron, 1969). The structured overview can

be used to create an anticipatory set for the material to be read by the learner. It can be teacher directed or developed as a joint student-teacher activity if incorporated with brainstorming activities such as webbing or clustering to organize the main ideas or concepts in a reading passage. Pre-instructional activities allow the learners to preview existing interrelationships in the reading selection.

In preparing to use a structural overview, the teacher may plan to use the following steps:

1. Read the selection to be studied in the textbook. Study the organization of ideas. Identify the most important concepts.
2. List the terms the students may need to know if they are to understand the material clearly. Include words students may already know as well as important new terms.
3. review the list to select the most essential terms. Arrange these terms in a diagram, picture or classification scheme that depicts the relationships between concepts being studied. Add other key terms if necessary.
4. Make a transparency or chart of the structured overview. Include only the most important terms on the overview. Explain why the terms are organized in this way.
5. Copies of the basic overview may be handed out to students. Encourage students to add information from their prior learning or experience to their copies of the overview.
6. During the presentation of the overview, allow students to cluster their knowledge around subtopics. This allows students to relate their prior knowledge to the overview topic. It helps students to anticipate the unit.
7. During the course of the unit, relate new information to the structured overview.

Figure 1 illustrates a structured overview developed to be used with a reading passage from a social studies text on the agricultural revolution.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Clustering or webbing are synonymous and are often confused with the structured overview. Clustering differs from a structured overview in one very significant way. They represent a graphic way to organize what is read without a hierarchical structure imposed by the teacher. They are most effective when generated by the student as a pre-instructional activity or as a realization technique to allow interaction with the reading assigment and make it more meaningful.

Clustering allows the students to graphically organize how the ideas in a reading are interrelated. It is an exceptional tool for notetaking or brainstorming. The center of the web includes the topic or main ideas, and the spokes contain supporting ideas. The type of cluster is determined by the information in a passage. Clustering can be most effective if accompanied by a follow-up activity such as a small group discussion, or a brief essay describing the interrelationships depicted by the cluster.

Anticipation Guides

Anticipation guides are designed to elicit an opinion or declarative response to a statement that challenges the learner's beliefs about a topic to be studied. To create an effective anticipation guide, the teacher must first identify the concepts and statements in the material to be read and focus on those concepts or statements which will challenge or confirm the student's beliefs. The teacher should select short, declarative sentences and put them in

a format that allows students to respond positively or negatively to the statements. Discussion of the student responses to the statements creates an anticipation to read the material to verify or challenge the students positions, and to descern why some students responded differently from others. After the students read the selection, the teacher can discuss their responses and the students can reevaluate their reactions to the posited statements. **Figure 2** shows an anticipation guide that can be used to introduce a reading selection comparing and contrasting the characteristics of Union and Confederate soldiers during the Civil War.

Insert Fig. 2 Here

Realization activities include strategies to allow the learner to interact with the reading passage and to extrapolate meaning from material which enhances learning. Inserted questions identifying key concepts and vocabulary are the most commonly used strategies by the classroom teacher. Level reading guides, interactive notetaking systems, and Guide-O-Ramas have been successfully used to assist students in identifying material within the reading passage. Vocabulary guides and compare and contrast outlines are also common methods of having students interact with the material to be learned.

Level Guides

Herber (1970) suggested that reading comprehension takes place on three different intellectual levels. Briefly, these three levels are: (1) literal, or what the author specifically states; (2) inferential, or what the author means by what he says; and (3) application, or how the information can be used. Such guides are usually constructed by using inserted questions to tap into the

three levels of comprehension. The following set of questions illustrate how the three levels of questioning could be developed from a single statement quoted in a history text attributed to the Greek historian Herodotus in his account of the Persian Wars.

"Herodotus, who loved a good story, wrote that the Persian army was so large that when it drank water, whole rivers ran dry."

1. What did the Greek historian Herodotus write about the Persian army? (literal level)

2. Who was Herodotus? (inferential level)

3. Why did Herodotus write that when the Persian army drank, whole rivers ran dry? (applied level)

It should be noted here that, when utilizing reading level guides to prepare for the TELS it is important to emphasize higher levels of reading questions. TELS objectives are predominantly stated at the inferential or applied levels. Most social studies teachers and texts require students to respond to questions at the lowest, or literal level in interpretation.

Interactive Notetaking

As an alternative to developing a formal outline of reading passages for study, interactive notetaking systems allow the learner to link the new passage to the learners existing knowledge. The interaction of the learner and the reading passage is made possible by inserting annotations in pencil in the margin of the text which make personal connections for the reader. Symbolic annotations allow the learner to classify information in a learning passage to identify the following realizations:

1. Confirm what was thought before. ✓
2. Contradict what was thought before. X
3. Identify new and interesting ideas. ★
4. Highlight important information. →
5. Earmark puzzling or confusing material for later discussion. ?

Figure 3 illustrates this technique with a reading selection in American history concerning the Louisiana Purchase. **Figure 4** illustrates the use of the clustering technique when used as a realization activity with the same reading passage.

Insert Fig. 3 and 4 Here

Guide-O-Rama

A Guide-O-Rama is a type of reading process guide that leads a student through a reading assignment page by page and paragraph by paragraph. It usually emphasizes organizational patterns, key ideas, concepts, details, literal meaning, and topic sentences within a paragraph structure. Content area may be covered, but the emphasis is on the process and skills of reading.

Guide-O-Ramas are excellent tools to assist a learner in identifying the important parts of a reading assignment. They can be especially useful in preparing for the TELS test in that they can direct the students to identify the main idea of a pharagraph, topic sentence or other specific components in the reading passage that relate to TELS objectives.

Contemplation of the reading assignment is essential to allow the learner the opportunity to assimilate the new material. It is important to make the reading a meaningful learning experience. Reading is a tool for learning. Most people only remember what they understand from a reading activity. The students need to restructure the learned material at the conclusion of a reading activity to fully understand and integrate the learning into their own experiences. Paraphrasing the meaning of reading passages and restating the main ideas in one's own words are common methods of assuring the integration of both content and skills. The recategorizing of terms and topics identified in a prereading activity often works to reinforce the concepts studied in the lesson and allows for retention of the content and a review of the skills used in the activity.

Often, simply restating the main ideas of the reading passage in the student's own words is sufficient to assure understanding of the reading. Having students write their own reactions to the reading in a notebook provides the reinforcement necessary to promote retention. If the teacher used a prereading activity such as a structured overview or a clustering scheme, the students could be asked to restructure the overview or cluster to meet their own perceptions of the topic they have just read.

Several word recognition activities have been used successfully to reinforce new words, ideas, and concepts covered in a reading passage. Crossword puzzles covering important terms and concepts in the reading have been used, as well as scrambled word exercises. Various vocabulary activities can be used as pre- or post-instructional strategies to improve technical vocabulary associated with specific reading assignments and assist in the integration of new material to be learned.

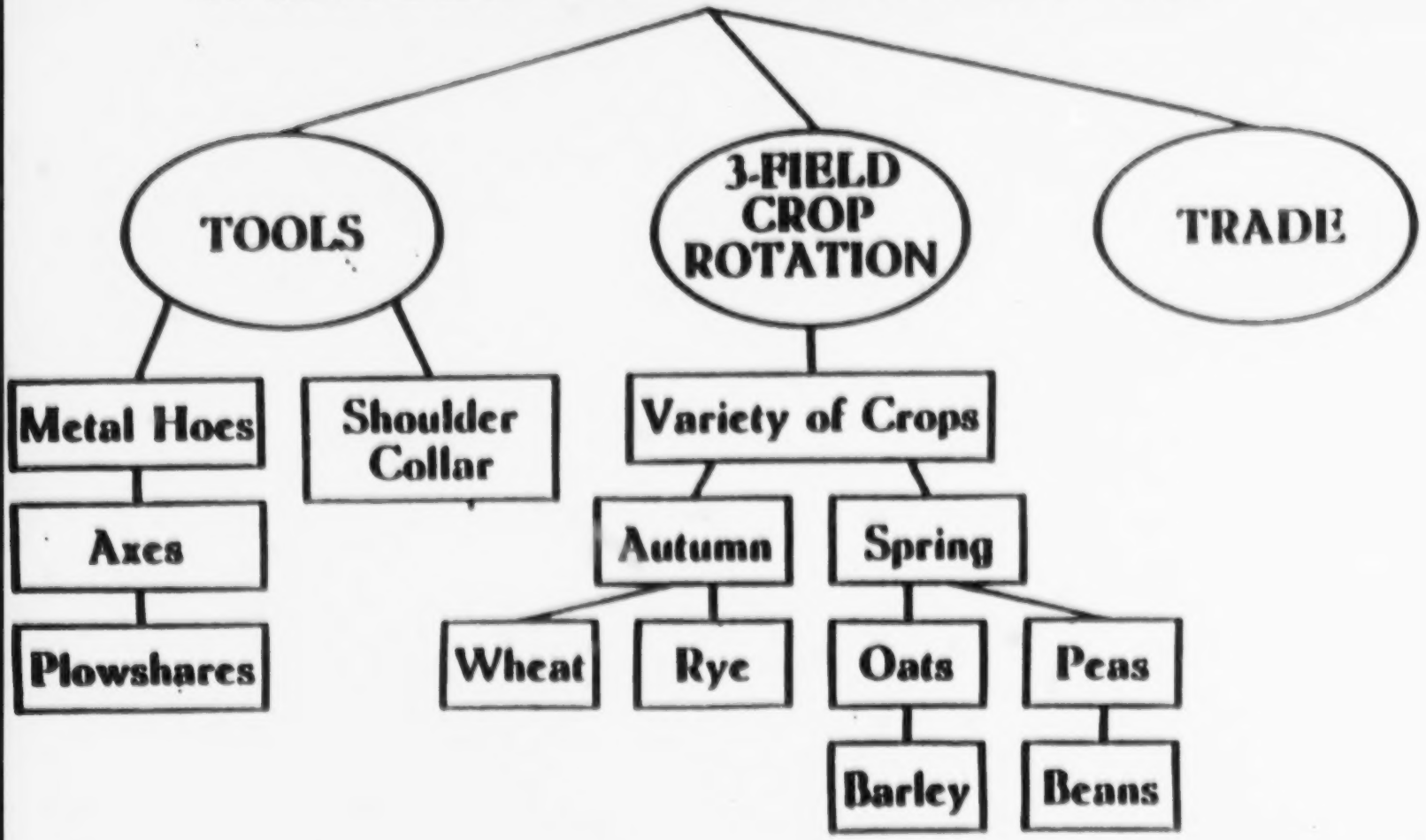
Summary

Few social studies educators doubt that reading skills are essential components of the social studies. A problem arises, however, when social studies teachers are asked to develop reading skills in their classrooms. Many lack the background and training to simultaneously approach instruction in their content area with the goal of integrating reading skills without detracting from a traditional content area approach. Nonetheless, it is increasingly important for teachers, and students as well, to realize the interrelationship of reading and learning across the content areas and to avoid the compartmentalization of essential skills necessary for student success in all classrooms.

The instructional strategies presented here reflect a researched base of knowledge that correlates to student learning and retention, and to the objectives and skills identified in the TELS tests. These strategies will enhance learning in the classroom without compromising educational values, subject area content, or the integrity of the educational program.

LIST OF FIGURES

A REVOLUTION IN AGRICULTURE



RESULT: Increased Population

Figure 1. Structured Overview

TELS Objectives

Figure 2. Anticipation Guide

THE COMMON SOLDIER OF THE CIVIL WAR

Directions: Johnny Reb and Billy Yank were common soldiers of the Civil War. You will be reading about some of their basic differences in your textbook. What do you think their differences will be? Before reading your assignment, Place the initials "JR" in front of the phrases that you think best describes Johnny Reb. Place the initials "BY" before the phrases that best describe Billy Yank. Do not mark thoses statements that you feel were common to both sides in the Civil War.

1. more likely to be able to read and write.
2. best able to adjust to living in open areas.
3. more likely to be from a rural setting.
4. took a greater interest in politics.
5. more deeply religious.
6. often not able to sign his name.
7. disliked regimentation of army life.
8. more likely to speak slowly and with an accent.
9. common man in the social order.
10. believed in slavery.

Figure 3. Interactive Notetaking

The United States buys a huge territory

A meeting was held in Paris, France, about the Louisiana Territory. In 1803 two Americans, Robert Livingston and James Monroe, met with Napoleon's officials. They were ready to offer France two million dollars for New Orleans.

During their talks one French leader asked, "Why doesn't the United States buy the whole Louisiana Territory? We will sell it and all of New Orleans for $15,000,000."

Livingston and Monroe were amazed at this surprising offer. Getting the Louisiana Territory would nearly double the size of the United States. The price for the land was about three and a half cents an acre. They had not dreamed of buying so much land at such a low price. Besides, they did not have the government's permission to do so.

There was no way to talk over the matter with President Jefferson and Congress. There was no telegraph or telephone.

Livingston and Monroe did not send a letter to ask what to do. It would have taken too long. They dared not wait weeks for an answer. Instead, they took France's offer. This business deal became known as the Louisiana Purchase.

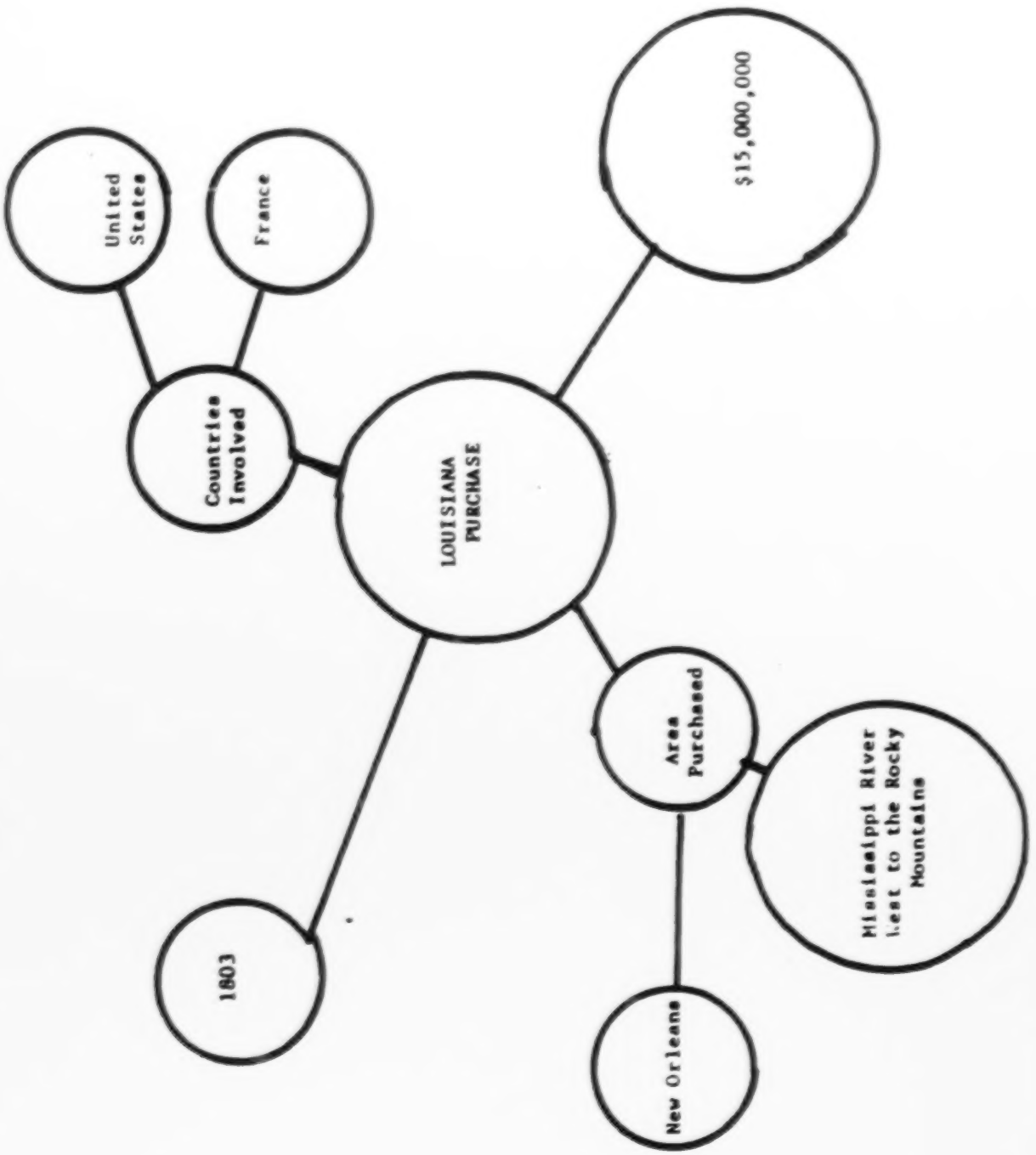
The Louisiana Purchase added a huge area to the United States. It pushed its borders west to the Rocky Mountains. It gave the United States the whole Mississippi River and New Orleans. Find this area on the map.

The Louisiana Purchase pleased some people but not others. The farmers west of the Appalachians were pleased. Hunters and trappers were happy about the Louisiana Purchase, too.

But many people who lived east of the Appalachians were not pleased. They grumbled that fifteen million dollars was too much money for wilderness. They did not know how rich the land was. They did not know that someday thirteen states would be formed from this large territory.

Brown, G. S. (1975). Our Country, Inquiry and Learning. Lexington, MA. Ginn & Co.

Figure 4. Clustering/Webbing



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